

13th Sunday after Pentecost

August 23, 2015

[Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18](#)

[John 6:56-70](#)

“No Such Thing as Atheism”

Remember that commercial, choosy mothers
choose Jif?

I don't know about you but I find all the choices we get to
make too often are overwhelming.

On the one hand, I'm happy that I can find peanut butter that
does not have added ingredients – no added oil, no sugar, one
can even find one with no salt.

I like having some choices.
And peanut butter is a fairly easy choice.
With or without those ingredients.
Chunky or smooth.
Organic or not.
Price.

But toothpaste?
Deodorant?
Suntan lotion? There are whole studies on what one should or
shouldn't wear, what's enough protection, how long do they
last. What they should and shouldn't have in them

Which phone and which company and which plan?

We just bought a new used car
One could lose a month of free time comparison shopping cars
and dealers.
We looked at one car and bought it!

There are a whole host of things I wish someone would just
tell me what I should choose.

Joshua seems to do just that – make it really easy for us:
“Put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the
River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord.”

But then he adds,

“If you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom
you WILL serve, “

See how quickly choices become overwhelming?

“Whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River OR the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living.”

Notice it is gods plural they have to choose from.

“But as for me and my household,” Joshua proclaims,
“We will serve the Lord.”

Joshua is very clear – this is the choice of your ancestors; this is the choice I’m making.

Now what are YOU going to do?

And they respond –
Of course we are going to serve the Lord our God
He has done marvelous things for us
And they can name them:

Led us out of slavery
Great signs in our midst
Protection along the way
Land for home and livelihood
Of course, we will serve the Lord

Two more times in this last chapter of the book
Joshua challenges them to make sure they knowwhom they are choosing.

And two more times they say,
YES, we will serve the Lord!

Well, as Ann Warner said upon finishing the book of Joshua,
(we were reading it at Wednesday Bible study)
the looming question is: So are they going to do it?
Are they going to serve the Lord now that they’ve said they would?

Well, the next book is Judges and we discover saying you’re going to serve the Lord and actually doing so are two different things.

Every time God turns around in Judges the people are serving other gods – the very ones they said they weren’t going to worship

and finding themselves in suffering situations
and crying out to the Lord
who graciously hears their prayers.

AND it becomes really clear
really quickly that even though they chose the Lord over other
gods,
It's really not as easy as choosing Jif off the shelf

And it becomes really clear
that it is actually God who is doing the choosing.

It is God who chooses to be with the people;
God who chooses to hear their cries;
God who chooses to receive them back;
God who chooses to send them deliverers--

which brings us back to that whole concept of choosing.

Do we have the ability to choose God or not?

In the gospel for today Jesus says,
"No one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father."

That would seem to mean that we cannot of our own accord
choose to follow Jesus; it must be granted.

We cannot choose to follow Christ.

But after Jesus says this, many of his disciples turned back and
stopped going around with him.

So, THERE is a choice:
We can choose to NOT follow
We can choose to worship those other gods, Joshua talked
about.

The author David Foster Wallace
(about whom the new movie *The End of the Tour* out in
theaters now is about) put it this way in a commencement
address he gave at Kenyon College in Ohio:

"In the day-to-day trenches of adult life,
There is actually no such thing as atheism.

There is no such thing as not worshipping.
Everybody worships.
The only choice we get is what to worship.

And the compelling reason for maybe choosing some sort of
god or spiritual-type thing to worship
be it JC or Allah
be it YHWH or the Wiccan Mother Goddess
or the Four Noble Truths or some inviolable set of ethical
principles is that pretty much anything else you worship will
eat you alive.

If you worship money and things,
If they are where you tap real meaning in life,
Then you will never have enough,
Never feel you have enough.

It's the truth.

Worship your body and beauty and sexual allure and you will
always feel ugly.

And when time and age start showing,
You will die a million deaths before they finally grieve you.

...

Worship power, you will end up feeling weak and afraid,
And you will need ever more power over others to numb you
to your own fear.

Worship your intellect, being seen as smart, you will end up
feeling stupid. A fraud, always on the verge of being found
out.

But the insidious thing about these forms of worship is not
that they're evil or sinful, it's that they're unconscious. They
are default settings.

They're the kind of worship you just gradually slip into,
day after day
getting more and more selective about what you see and how
you measure value without ever being fully aware
That that's what you're doing."

Joshua and Jesus, I think, are trying to break into that sort of
unconsciousness –
"Choose this day"

Jesus asks the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?"
Choose – stay or go?

They could have chosen to leave like the other disciples,
but they don't.

Simon Peter says –
"Lord, to whom can we go?
YOU have the words of eternal life."

Peter gets what David Wallace is talking about these 20
centuries later:
That no matter what – we're going to worship something and
he gets that those other things are just not going to bring life.

He understands that following Jesus is not a DEAD end.
Eternal here doesn't just mean after we're dead.
It means always
Following Jesus will always/eternally lead to life even when
there is a cross looming before us and we are quite sure he
must be mistaken and it will lead to death.

No – following Jesus always leads to life.

Of course, Peter's words do not mean that they are going to be
able to follow Jesus; as a matter of fact, we know that they all
fall away.

And verse 70, not listed in your reading but I read it anyhow,
has Jesus saying,
"Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?"

Peter thinks he's choosing, but Jesus reveals:
No, I already chose you.

So what does it mean?
I think it means we *can* choose death,
other gods, and we do all the time.

Death we can choose;
life is a gift.

Gods we can grab onto like we're in control,
but God we can only receive.

Like Peter,
we know to return here to start over again
to find life –
that spirit and life Jesus talks about
when at the end of the week
we know that flesh is not enough

and that life Jesus talks about
comes not as we choose it
but as it is given:

In bread and wine
In water and word
In community and forgiveness

Given we are reminded – “for you,” “for you”
Given for us
Over and over again
Whether we’ve followed well
Or turned away
For us

Not here because we have chosen God
But here because God in Jesus the Christ
Has chosen us.

Amen

The Reverend Dianne O. Loufman
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